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MAIN FILE

POST-CONGRESS THOUGHTS ON THE SPIRITUAL  
SEVEN-YEAR PLAN OF ART AND LITERATURE

Translation

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Goorgen Mahari

Prior to the 21st Congress and during its turbulent days, there was little time for thought. The voluminous newspapers and the ever-busy radio, day in day out and at every hour, would paint the canvass of our tomorrow with bright colors and shades and delicate hues. The symphony of communistic figures and charts were heard day and night. There appeared poems dedicated to the magnificent achievements of the great Seven-Year Plan. From the platform of the great hall in the Kremlin could be heard the aggressive and masculine words of communistic messengers from all corners of the world.

Art and literature unfortunately (or fortunately) cannot be pre-planned. A cantata is not milk; a play is not iron ore; the novel and the poem are not aluminum. Art falls in the spiritual category of things, but this category in turn has its own spiritual plan.

Taking into consideration our creative Seven-Year Plan based on the production of material and the expansion of finances which are to be the source of wealth, luxury and welfare for our country, let us see what we expect from art by 1966.

Many things, indeed! Let us start with playwriting before going further. Some of our playwrights think that the word "dramatoorgia" (playwriting) is a compound noun derived from "dram" (money) and "toor" (give). Experts repeatedly stress that we have some playwrights who have authored from 20 to 30 plays, with little difference between their first and last. And what the playwright has turned out, the director has had to grapple with; - the play has somehow been staged and after half a season or so consigned to the archives. On the other hand, if the theater management has tried to prolong the life of the play through artificial means, the theater has echoed with emptiness. The playwright is not concerned over this. He figures if the play wasn't a success he could sit down and write another, and, of course, he does!

Faults attributed to our theaters and to our directors are unfounded and unjustified. They are accused of being too strict and "hard-to-please" and as a result individual plays seldom

appear on theatrical programs. Just the opposite is true: a strict attitude does not exist; the plays often get to the theater by the "service entrance" or through other "channels". We often hear a new play described as having no literary value yet suitable for the stage. This is wrong and undesirable. A play cannot be a play if it does not have literary value, because after all a play is literature.

By 1966 we must create lasting plays. Let there be an end to the seasonal plays and their staging. We must economize the means provided by the government. We must think of the audience. Let our promising and outstanding playwrights sit on one play for years, refine, polish and (as the saying goes) elevate it to a masterpiece. It's not right to cook up plays by taking advantage of official and unofficial opportunities, nor for years to inspire hope and cause disillusion.

By 1966 we must have our "Pepo" and "Khatabala," our "Patvi Hamar," "Baghdasar Akhbar." Playwrights "A", "B", & "C" and others must give this matter serious thought.

But let's go on: I am not competent nor an authority on art, but as a reader, viewer and listener, I have my opinions and viewpoints about our Seven-Year Art Plan. Take music for instance. We had greats like Komitas, Spendiarian & Romanos Melikian; we have Khacha-turian and we recently lost Sathian. Today a generation of talented composers is living and creating, but I would like our music to follow a more clear and definite mother-trend [mother-tongue] in the style of Komitas. It is no accident that songs which are in the hearts and on the lips of the people, possess the flavor, the aroma and the life-blood of Armenian folk-lore. Let us not confuse our folk songs with the "shakasteh" type and its offshoot [Translator's note: refers to songs with Persian influence]. In order not to founder, our composers must firmly stand for the "mother-trend" in our songs, and for the development of the immortal traditions of Komitas in enriching, deepening and widening the road to progress.

Let there be more immortal songs. For the sake of song appreciation, let our radio avoid broadcasting songs that last but lack the beauty of the butterfly. Our heroic people who created communism deserve better spiritual nourishment. Our composers are duty-bound to pay more attention to lyrics and avoid putting lame and limp poems to music.

The great, sad poet Siamantov said: I would like to die singing. Our people, our living people who created communism want to sing while they live and create. They should not be deprived of

that song. That song must be great, deep and magnificent, else it will not be heard because communism itself is a song, the greatest song.

And now for the cadres of players. During the Seven-Year Plan we must have new, talented and qualified players. The Theatrical Institute must not permit its graduates to become accountants, housewives and such. After graduating from the Institute, it is discovered that this or that graduate is completely unsuitable for the stage, that his study at and graduation from the Institute has been a mistake. Such mistakes and misunderstandings must not occur during the new Seven-Year Plan. We do not have stars such as Siranoosh and Voskanian, while there are none to replace Armenian Papazian, Gulazian, H. Nersisian, Avetisian, Vagharshian and other greats of our theater. What is to be done? Frankly, I don't know either. But we should worry and think and get results. In the words of Charentz: "Has the talent of the Armenian people run out?" Of course not. We must search, explore, discover and reclaim new ones from anonymity. That is how those stars were discovered. We don't deny that an individual can be naturally talented. Many such talented individuals have been lost because of unsuitable environment, and many a lesser-talented individual has reached stardom through hard work.

What do we expect from our movies? During recent years, we have put many new movies on the screen, but let us admit that progress has been unsatisfactory. We have not had films as successful as "Pepo," nor comedies like "Kikos." We find that while the means for ample progress is available on the main road, our films are still on the side roads. During the new Seven-Year Plan, "Hai-Film" must present all types of superior-quality movies. The creative and living man of the Seven-Year Plan, our life with its ebbs and flows, its eternal light and retreating shadows, must be put on the screen.

Now a few words about our critics: Our critics are not forthright. Our art and literary critics are occupied with the trivial, and when they do go into their work seriously, they are way off base. Between the two, literary criticism seems to be the better. "Sovetakan Arvest" has published discussions on music, movies and, currently, talks on the theater. In publishing the article by Comrade Vagharshian, the editors draw special attention to the section on the role of the director in the contemporary theater. Comrade L. Hakhverdian writes: "Production is the soul of the contemporary theater." Comrade Vagharshian doesn't agree and can't accept the thesis that "Hakhverdians opinions cannot be contradicted or doubted." In the opinion of Comrade Vagharshian, Hakhverdian

should sometimes qualify his statements with "I feel," "It seems to me," "I think that," or "If I'm not mistaken," and so on. Use of such phrases would justify mistakes. What freedom! I would like to say a few words about the role of the director in the contemporary theater, benefitting by the kind advice of my old friend Comrade Vagharshian and being wrong as many times as I like! "I feel" that the role of the director is a heavy one when he is staging a new play. "In my opinion," the director of a classical play doesn't have as much work cut out as the director of a new play. When the director stages the "Sirtee Arato", here, "if I'm not mistaken", he is the soul of the contemporary theater. "Perhaps it is so" and "I think" that I made an honest mistake. Such is the right to be wrong!

During our new Seven-Year Plan we must try to lighten the director's load, and we can achieve this when we have talented stars, a collective of new talented groups and when the director has access to good plays and is not burdened with a mediocre play for which he must work harder than the author. No director can destroy "Hamlet," but any director cannot save "Sirtee Arato." "If I am not mistaken", this is also true.

We must free the director from the unthankful chores of co-authorship, must give him a chance to emerge as a creator, an analyst, an expressive soul and not as a nurse.

We do not have forthright and fearless critics fighting for the true form of Soviet Art and Literature. Our critics are afraid to be unpopular. Pettyness and personal grudges interfere with the Main Objective. Each critic has chosen a classical work, hidden behind its pages and is living quietly. And if he emerges a few times during the year to reflect an imposed viewpoint, he feels that the local village doctors, in trying to correct the eyebrow, have blinded the patient, and assuming the expressions of a serious surgeon, he commences his "treatment." Our main critics must follow our literary progress day by day, read newly published books, pick the good, discard the mediocre and write monthly and yearly reviews. We stress that they must read newly published books. Our critics do not do so. They dread voluminous books and their authors. "Let the walking stick break but not on my head" is their motto. Our critics feel this to be below their dignity.

Our new Seven-Year Plan must elevate the standard and quality of criticism. Critics must be sharp as to form and content. The critic must see the good and the bad, must be independent and free from influence. He must not fall under the influence of "forewords" and other opinions in judging a book. He should not sell his literary

conscience to the devil for a mass of pottage. And probably during the Seven-Year Plan we will be rid of the remaining devils.

We can also discuss painters, sculptors, singers, the art of dancing and the like. Without so doing, this talk has been lengthy enough. Our new Seven-Year Plan is to be a great flight from victory to victory, from summit to higher summit. Literature and art must not linger, but must move forward in step with our great era and its needs.

We shall without doubt achieve our spiritual goal during our Seven-Year Plan. We shall achieve this because of our magnificent party and our heroic people. We shall achieve our goal because honest and dedicated workers - masters and leaders of their Great Work - are shouldering the great task of creating the Soviet Spiritual Culture.

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